

California Red-Legged Frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*)

Status -- Federal: Threatened; California: None

Photo: Bill Palmer, Outdoor California



The California Red-Legged frog is the largest native frog in the Western U.S. A highly aquatic species, it is usually found in streams and their adjacent habitat. Within a watershed, they make use of burrows and other terrestrial retreats in order to avoid dehydration as well as predators. Burrows provide a cooler, moist environment, an essential daytime shelter during the dry season; and a winter

retreat, particularly for those populations found inland, where they tend to hibernate. Red-Legged frogs measure 1.5 to 5.1 inches in body length. Their color is brown to reddish brown above, with irregular black spots sometimes with light centers. They can be distinguished from bull frogs by their lack of green color on their back, and the presence of prominent skin folds running along both sides of their back, from eye to tail (photo 1).

The underside of their hind legs and occasionally the abdomen are red in adults (photo 2), hence the name Red-legged frog..



Photo: John Brode, CDFG

California Department of Pesticide Regulation
Endangered Species Project
California Department of Fish & Game



California Red-Legged Frog



Source: CDFG NDDB 1997

Distribution

The California Red-Legged frog was originally found over most of California below 5000 feet, and west of the deserts and the Sierra Nevada crest. CRLFs have disappeared from about 75% of their historical range.

Current records in the Department of Fish and Game's Natural Diversity Data Base can be found for the following counties: Alameda, Amador, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Fresno, Marin, Mendocino, Merced, Monterey, Placer, Plumas, Riverside, San Benito, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano

Sonoma, Stanislaus and Tehama.

Behavior California Red-Legged frogs found in coastal drainages are active all year, whereas those found in interior sites might hibernate, as winter conditions tend to be more extreme inland. CRLFs disperse upstream and downstream of their breeding habitat to forage and seek temporary terrestrial retreats such as burrows, moist leaf litter, and others.

Food The diet of California Red-Legged frogs is highly variable. During their larval stages they eat algae. Terrestrial invertebrates have been found to be the most common food items of adult frogs. Vertebrates such as Pacific tree frogs (*Hyla regilla*) and California mice (*Peromyscus californicus*) represent over half of the prey mass eaten by larger frogs. Feeding activity likely occurs along the shoreline and on the surface of the water.

Reproduction Breeding takes place from November through March and varies throughout the range, often effected by weather conditions. Egg-laying usually occurs during or shortly after large rainfall events in late winter or early spring. Females deposit egg masses on emergent vegetation near the surface of the water. The spherical egg masses contain 2,000 to 5,000 moderate-sized (0.08-0.11 inches in diameter), dark reddish brown eggs. The eggs hatch in 6 to 14 days. Larvae undergo metamorphosis 3.5 to 7 months after hatching. Sexual maturity in Red-Legged frogs is reached at 3 to 4 years of age. California Red-Legged frogs might live 8 to 10 years.